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Use of social media in undergraduate communication classes

by

Aimee Langager

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (Arts & Humanities)

Program of Study Committee:
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Ames, Iowa

2015

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ABSTRACT

Social media are changing the scope of communication in both personal and professional spheres. Like other technologies before it, social media platforms were not created for educational use but some instructors see educational value. Adapting new tools for teaching can be a complex process involving many components. Previous studies have shown some benefits and a few ways in which social media can be incorporated into undergraduate education. Additionally, teaching methods and principles can serve as guidelines for the process. However, neither of those gives the full picture. Therefore, this qualitative study uses in-depth interviews to examine the experiences of instructors who use social media in their teaching practices to uncover more details about the practicality, successes, and challenges of this growing technology.

The results indicated that instructors in communications fields who incorporate social media feel the need to teach communication in all forms. Being aware of new platforms, uses, and conventions, in addition to current trends and issues in social media, allowed for discussions about good practices. They felt that social media offered opportunities for collaborative learning that supported their learning objectives. The most common platforms were Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Often the platforms were a vehicle for sharing content and discussions outside of class time. While instructors said there were challenges in adapting social media for classroom use, they felt that it added enough value to their courses to continue.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The field of education and pedagogy is and always has been adapting to technological changes in order to best serve students. From film and overhead projectors in the 1920s and '30s, to calculators and personal computers, teaching professionals have continually revised the use of electronic technology to supplement their instruction (Dunn, 2014). Now, as books and paper give way to e-textbooks, laptops, and personal devices, opportunities for teachers to engage students in multimodal methods that reach beyond the classroom walls are seemingly endless.

Early computer networks in the 1970s gave way to the creation of the World Wide Web and communication technologies started to change faster than ever. In 1997, the first learning management system (LMS), Blackboard, and the first social network site (SNS), SixDegrees.com, appeared (Langmia, Tyree, O'Brien, & Sturgis, 2014). LMS is a broad term that denotes a number of interrelated software applications that automate electronic training events or educational environments. Content access and content development are two of the many utilities of LMS applications. Others include administration tools, assessment capabilities, and security all of which make a subset of LMSs ideal for use at educational institutions (Ellis, 2009; Watson & Watson, 2007).

SNSs have a wide range of looks and functions, all of which can appeal to teachers in order to achieve different learning objectives. Currently the second most popular website and most popular social media platform (Alexa, 2015), Facebook entered the scene in 2004 as a way for college students to connect with each other, and it subsequently expanded to use by the general population (Facebook, 2015). Launched in 2006, Twitter, an increasingly popular

microblogging site (Alexa, 2015), allows registered users to post messages less than 140 characters and follow users while unregistered visitors can view those tweets (Twitter, 2015). Emails, LMSs, and SNSs all offer ways for users to immediately contact each other. While emails and LMSs provide a certain amount of privacy, SNSs usually function in a public forum. As these types of technology become more popular, instructors face new possibilities, as well as the potential benefits and risks, to connect with their students outside of the physical classroom.

Using social media technology to supplement or enhance the traditional university academic environment is a growing trend. From increasing engagement to developing new skills, social media can offer new ways to supplement lessons by encouraging communication and collaboration between students and instructors. Recent studies range from an analysis of student perceptions of Facebook use in courses for management students to an experiment testing causal relationships between Twitter use and grades (Buzzetto-More, 2012; Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013).

As more students carry personal electronic devices, some instructors are choosing to embrace them as tools to engage learners. This study focuses on the detailed descriptions and justifications provided by teachers currently using social media technology in educational settings. This research investigates what influenced these instructors to include social media in their instruction and how they see it as an opportunity to enhance learning, guide their students in wise communication choices, and prepare them for the workplace by incorporating social media into their teaching practices.

The literature reviewed in the following pages offers a look at ways in which social media are impacting society and communication, potential ways that social media can be

used in an academic setting, and types of pedagogies used in undergraduate education. This study adds to research in the field of education by sharing the experiences and perceptions of instructors currently using social media in their teaching practices. In allowing instructors to reflect on why and how they use social media in their classes, this study highlights personal successes and challenges with integrating this emerging technology. The approaches and ideas voiced by the participants in this study may help develop techniques for instructors wishing to supplement their instruction with social media.

Study Objectives

This qualitative study provides a comprehensive look into the experiences of undergraduate instructors who have incorporated social media technology into their communication classes. The research questions that informed the interview process are as follows:

- RQ1:** Why are instructors incorporating social media into their teaching practices?
- RQ2:** How are instructors incorporating social media into their teaching practices?
- RQ3:** What are instructors' experiences with incorporating social media into their teaching practices?

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Use in Society and Communication

Social media have transformed communication practices. Conversations with friends or family scattered across the map; personalized advertising popping up in Twitter feeds based on engine search habits; planning a kitchen remodel with ideas from Pinterest: these are just a couple of the ways that social media have changed the way messages are delivered and received. “The mediated world in which we live has important implications for how we communicate with others” (Borchers, 2013, p. 377). Social media affect how people get their news (Mitchell, Holcomb, & Page, 2013), how civic and political movements are mobilized (Rodriguez, 2013; Uysal & Yang, 2013), and how consumers decide where to shop and eat (Wilken, 2014). As ubiquitous as social media are, the term seems to elude a single, conclusive definition. In fact, one public relations website offered over 30 definitions (Cohen, 2011). Platforms emerge and disappear, mobile devices change, and interests shift daily. Social media are constantly adapting and evolving.

Therefore, communication methods are also changing, even in regards to employment. Previous studies have shown that employers are looking for strong communication skills when searching for potential employees, regardless of the occupation (Grasz, 2014; Gray, Emerson, & MacKay, 2005; Kyllonen, 2013). In addition to communication skills, employment can depend on savvy technology skills because many jobs require digital management in one way or another. Hiring decisions can be influenced by online professional identity and digital literacy, so many instructors believe students need

to be educated about online civil discourse and be given a chance to develop those skills (Ferrell & Gray, 2014).

Social media even plays a role after landing a job. A recent study shows that there is some evidence that social media use at work may have a positive effect on co-worker support, job satisfaction, and job performance (Charoensukmongkol, 2014). Another study showed that two out of three employees made use of social media for work and that it was positively impacting their performance (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). Indeed, social media are increasingly an arena for collaboration and knowledge sharing amongst employees.

Social Media Use in Education

Initial studies of social media use in education started appearing in 2008 (Heiberger & Harper, 2008). Pew Research from 2010 reports that 86% of undergraduates use SNSs and that number is likely increasing (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). This data certainly shows that many undergraduates are familiar with the social media platforms. While a majority of those students probably are not using them for their classes yet, chances are they will soon. Also, there is increasing concern that college-aged or younger users of social media are not completely aware of the pitfalls of sharing their lives and thoughts on social media, with problems ranging from cyber bullying, expulsion from school, job loss, to suicide (Journell, Ayers, & Beeson, 2014; Ollier-Malaterre & Rothbard, 2015; Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011), prompting scholars to urge college instructors to emphasize social media literacy in the curriculum. Journell et al. (2014) suggest instructors need to establish rules for social media discussion, while Keengwe et al. (2009) suggest instructors need training before

attempting to use social media. Research on the uses and gratifications of social media indicate that undergraduates' preferred activities on SNSs range from social interaction to information-seeking/surveillance to self-expression, status-seeking, entertainment, and escape (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Whether students are using social media for education or not, specific activities can make a positive impact on several student learning outcomes, like grade point average and student engagement (Junco, 2012; Junco et al., 2013).

Pearson Learning Solutions and Babson Survey Research Group have been tracking faculty use of social media since 2009. The latest survey, published in October 2013, reports that 41% of faculty use social media at least monthly for teaching, while 70% use it for personal purposes. The biggest growth from the previous year came from blogs, wikis, and LinkedIn with over five percent increases each. Facebook and Twitter each had only had an increase of one percent. Though small, these figures show an increase in use of social media technology for teaching purposes (McEwan, 2012; Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). As this number grows, so does the need to open up a larger dialogue amongst instructors seeking to incorporate the technology into their classrooms (Chen & Bryer, 2012).

However, just inserting the technology into the course is not a guarantee of its success. Many students are familiar with SNSs and use them in their personal lives, but that does not guarantee that they will be comfortable using them for educational purposes (Farkas, 2012). For instance, students may not want the instructor to have access to their personal posts on certain sites. Additionally, students may not be familiar with an instructor's choice of social media and would need to be educated on the technology in addition to the content of the course (Groff, Klopfer, Osterweil, & Haas, 2009).

More research needs to be conducted on the benefits of incorporating social media in education, but there are emerging trends to suggest there are many. Instilling critical knowledge, increasing student engagement, and fostering group collaboration have all been connected with appropriate social media use (Cox, 2014; Junco, 2014). Social media afford students with opportunities to take advantage of intellectual and motivational tools: exposure to multiple forms of literacy, analysis, interpretation, critique, evaluation, ownership, creativity, and an expanded audience. Instructors can leverage social networking platforms to provide additional times and places for increased communication, collaboration, and participation. Students not only benefit from the relationship they can develop with each other but with the instructor through proper management and feedback (Poore, 2013; Svendsen, 2012).

Studies also show that using social media, even with faculty differences in preference of certain applications, can help achieve learning outcomes (Cao, Ajjan, & Hong, 2013). Indeed, there is great potential for instructors to use the social media tools they are comfortable with to create a rich learning environment. Using social media to support and assess student learning can be a way to engage students in a collaborative process. While social media may help students learn, the focus should be placed on the learning process rather than on specific technologies (Tay & Allen, 2011). In addition to learning about different subjects, getting students involved with social media in an educational setting can teach them boundaries, etiquette, and use (Groff et al., 2009).

As noted in the previous section, there are many definitions of social media. For the purposes of this study, social media are defined as online platforms used to share information and resources including Internet forums, blogs, video or photo sharing, consumer rating, or

other SNSs (Nielsen, 2014). SNSs are online or mobile applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, that allow users to create profiles and interact with online communities through updates or private messages (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). LMSs, such as Blackboard and Moodle, have fewer opportunities for users to build an online social presence (Veletsianos, Kimmons, & French, 2013). As students transition from educational pursuits to the professional world, this study is concerned with how instructors use social media tools to help students develop their online presence for professional purposes. Therefore, the present study will focus on social media tools that include SNSs, blogs, microblogs, and wikis but will not include LMSs.

Communicating via social media plays a significant part in students' lives. It is understandable, then, that teachers might seek ways to adopt this technology. From sharing content to developing skills and awareness, there are many motivations for instructors to integrate social media into their teaching practices. There are also a variety of techniques for implementation and this study sets out to contribute to the emerging field of social media use in education by opening the dialogue on how instructors are developing strategies that align with their core pedagogy.

Pedagogical Methods in Undergraduate Education

There have been many changes in pedagogy over the years, but the foundation for instructors still rings true today. "Education is a social process" (Dewey, 1929, p. 292). Communication is fundamental for successful learning. Whether that communication is between instructors and their students, among learners, or part of a public environment, being able to articulate a clear message is an important part of the academic process. With so many

new communication technologies, finding a strategy that enriches the learning environment and emphasizes coherent delivery in multiple modalities can be difficult. There are many approaches to pedagogy and a teaching style that works for one instructor may not work for another. Similarly, not all students have the same learning style. While there is no universal approach, over the last few decades there has been a shift from the traditional knowledge transmission model to a more collaborative method (Chickering & Gamson, 1989; Ventimiglia, 1994).

Sometimes referred to as didactic instruction or teacher-centered learning, the knowledge transmission model represents a more passive type of learning (Nie & Lau, 2010). Often viewed as the opposite of student-centered approaches or discussion-based classes, the transmission model is characterized as instructors giving information to students who receive knowledge. Cuban (1983) argued that these constructs simplify a complex learning environment and defined teacher-centered instruction as:

Far more teacher talk than student talk during instruction, most teacher questions call for reciting factual information, most instruction occurs with whole group rather than small groups or with individuals, use of class time is determined by the teacher, teachers often rely upon textbooks with lesser use of films, tapes, records, television, or other technology, tests usually concentrate on factual recall of information, the classroom is usually arranged into rows of desks or chairs facing a blackboard with a teacher's desk nearby. (p. 160)

Most classrooms are stereotypically depicted this way and deemed old-fashioned. From Cuban's description, it is clear that knowledge-transmission learning environments lack the social components that drive collaborative learning.

To reinforce the need for instructors to adapt with the times, Boyer argued that “teaching is also a dynamic endeavor [...] between the teacher’s understanding and the student’s learning” (pp. 23-24). He believes that teaching must go beyond just transmitting knowledge from one person to another; teaching should transform and extend that knowledge beyond the classroom and the campus. Creating a connection between the information students are acquiring in an academic setting and the context of the real-world helps them develop more of a capacity and inclination to learn (Boyer, 1990). This can be done through individual exercises and assignments, but there are many benefits to allowing students to collaborate. Through collaboration, students stay engaged by interacting with peers and develop more ways to show respect for themselves and others. Working together, students can improve grades, learn how to find and share quality sources, and develop teamwork skills (Ventimiglia, 1994).

Social constructivism influences many teaching methods. Vygotsky (1962) theorized that along with the personal process, an integral part of language learning was social interactions. Through stages of active and discovery learning, students are presented with challenges that allow them to develop meaning through retrieving, using, manipulating, and evaluating information (Gilbert, 2002; Liu, 2005). Highly influenced by social constructivism, collaborative learning started gaining popularity in the 1980s. Bruffee (1981) argued that it helps “students test the quality and value of what they know by trying to make sense of it to other people like themselves—their peers” (p. 745).

Many researchers have highlighted the power of learning through interaction with others. Bandura first connected the influence of mass media on behavior and social attitudes while exploring the processes of social learning theory. These concepts were related to the

exposure to television and forecasted that observational technology would likely increase, decreasing the roles of traditional models (Bandura, 1976). Particularly regarding mass media, Bandura analyzes the communication pathways through which thoughts and actions can be influenced through social cognitive theory. Direct pathways “promote changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding participants” (p. 265). Through socially mediated pathways participants connect to one another and strengthen the desire for those changes (Bandura, 2001).

Recognizing that teaching and learning environments are multifaceted and usually fall along a continuum, rather than at one extreme or the other, it is important to look at multiple factors when categorizing a teaching style (Schuh, 2004). Instructors often combine their ideals with institutional policies, individual students, group dynamics, and many other variables to develop practices from pedagogical foundations.

Chickering and Gamson (1989) laid out seven principles for effective teaching practices: 1) Encourage Student-Faculty Contact, 2) Encourage Cooperation Among Students, 3) Encourage Active Learning, 4) Give Prompt Feedback, 5) Emphasize Time on Task, 6) Communicate High Expectations, and 7) Respect Talents and Diverse Ways of Learning. In addition to stating these principles, they highlight the importance of each action and the effects that they can have on students. Furthermore, they emphasize that instructors need to understand that all students are different, and that it may take multiple strategies to help students stay motivated to learn and apply their knowledge to the world around them.

In addition to Chickering and Gamson’s principles, Bloom’s Taxonomy is another way for instructors to establish learning objectives. The categories of the cognitive domain include: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation

(Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956). However, they've since been revised with changes to terminology and order: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create (Krathwohl, 2002). While there have been many updates including a Bloom's Digital Taxonomy (Churches, 2008), the thinking skills and educational objectives still provide a starting point for instructors to develop relevant activities. Examples for each element in the Digital Taxonomy include searching and bookmarking for remembering; blogging and Tweeting for understanding; sharing and editing for applying; comparing and reverse engineering for analyzing; critiquing and monitoring for evaluating; and programming and broadcasting for creating. A separate tool based on Bloom's Taxonomy, The Pedagogy Wheel V4.0, visualizes iPad apps that can help facilitate each element (Carrington, 2015).

Since social media are such an integral part of society and the way we communicate, it makes sense that many instructors are looking to adopt these technologies as part of their teaching practices. Social media can serve as a motivational tool and aid in collaborative, active, and discovery learning. This study adds descriptive accounts of real-life experiences from instructors who are using social media in their classes to the body of research. Through analyzing their approaches, this research can identify specific ways in which instructors try to engage methods, such as Chickering and Gamson's principles and Bloom's Taxonomy, to strengthen their teaching.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Methodological Approach

This study was approached through a phenomenological tradition of inquiry using qualitative research methods as described by Creswell (2013). Based on Husserl's foundation, Heidegger and Moustakas, along with other philosophers and researchers, developed the phenomenological tradition to describe and investigate the essence of experiences (Detmer, 2013). Phenomenology departs from other qualitative research traditions in its emphasis on taking a fresh look of the phenomenon through the eyes of the people directly experiencing it (Crotty, 1998). Phenomenology allows researchers to examine new subject matter and reduce the *what* and the *how* of an experience into the invariant essentials of that experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The focus of this study was to explore how instructors make sense of their use of social media technology in undergraduate teaching practices and search among those experiences for the essential meaning that defines the phenomenon. Their descriptions help to establish a comprehensive characterization of "shared experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 106) when using social media for educational purposes.

Methods

By using in-depth interviews, this study was able to provide a complex look at individual experiences and meaning expressed in the participants' own words. Through precise description from the perspective of instructors, the researcher investigated the emergence of themes relating to the phenomenon of social media use in undergraduate

education (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As such, they provided “insight into their thought processes and the value judgments” (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 86) of the participants.

Though there are many advantages to approaching these research questions through interviews, the nature of interviewing brought about its own set of challenges. When asking respondents for their accounts, the interviewer had to be cognizant of trustworthiness and reliability (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Willingly or unwillingly, people alter their stories by lying, distorting the truth, inaccurately remembering, or presenting information they think the interviewer wants to hear (Berger, 2013). Therefore, to avoid imposing bias in the answers, this researcher tried to maintain a neutral expression while remaining engaged by nodding encouragement, if needed.

A pilot interview was conducted in November 2014 to test the instrument and focus the questions. This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on July 11th, 2014. The interviews for the study were conducted from January to March 2015 and ranged from 20 to 60 minutes in length. The interviews were conducted in-person at sites chosen by the interviewees. After explaining the purpose of the study to the participants, confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Interviewees then signed an informed consent document (Appendix A). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The interviewer also took notes of the interview, including the surroundings and nonverbal behaviors. The transcriptions and notes were never linked with participant names. When reporting data, the instructors are only identified by pseudonyms.

The interview format was semi-structured. The interviewer had a list of potential questions (Appendix B) but, to ensure flexibility and eliminate potential interviewer bias, the questions were asked in an order that worked with the flow of the interview. Follow-up

answers and clarifications were solicited throughout the interview. The focus of the interviews was to generate accounts and perceptions of the interviewees and every attempt was made to allow the respondents to elaborate while still addressing the main themes (Mason, 2004).

Participants

To provide research with a multidisciplinary application, undergraduate instructors were purposively selected from the departments of Journalism and Mass Communication, Speech Communication, Communication Studies, and English of a mid-size American university. The areas of interest fall in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with a concentration on the process and contributions of communication. While instructors in other disciplines may utilize social media in their teaching practices, the researcher chose to focus on these specific departments due to their expertise in the field of communication. These instructors are the people who study communication and are best situated to theorize about how social media affects the interaction between students and can appropriately be adapted to the classroom.

Recommendations from faculty within each department helped determine participants. The instructors selected for interviews met the requirements of teaching at the undergraduate level and using social media in their class or classes. There were twelve participants total, four male and eight female. Participants ranged in age from late 20s to mid 50s. They had been teaching between 4–25 years and represented lecturers, senior lecturers, assistant professors, and associate professors. Some participants had come from working in

the industry, while others had started in academics. The instructors varied in the amount of time using social media in their classes, from one semester to several years.

Data Analysis

Data was collected as recordings and transcripts of the in-depth interviews. This material then became “sources of information through analysis, and of meaning through interpretation” (Jensen, 2012, p. 270). As the data was collected, the researcher analyzed and coded the information according to the philosophical phenomenological method. The researcher kept a journal throughout the process and wrote down thoughts, ideas, and feelings as they came. In doing so, the researcher attempted to set aside assumptions, biases, and preconceptions during the collection and analysis process in order to address presuppositions and try to bracket past knowledge of the phenomenon. The researcher employed horizontalization by initially treating every statement with equal amount of value to the research and finding the significant ones based on the data (Moustakas, 1994). The idea of phenomenological reduction is to describe the experience as the participants have encountered it without interpretation (Giorgi, 1997). During this stage, the researcher used asides to capture initial thoughts in the margins of the transcripts and on sticky notes in the journal. As the research progressed, longer commentaries helped the researcher start to identify preliminary impressions.

To start the coding process, the researcher looked at the transcripts from different perspectives and identified the essential structures of the phenomenon. The researcher then categorized statements of significance that provide understanding of the participants’ experiences and established themes (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Using descriptive

coding, the researcher assigned labels to passages in the data that summarized the basic topics covered in each interview. Categories arose based on these topics, the researcher created documents that reflected each category and eventually copied the corresponding sections of transcripts into those documents.

By seeking out phrases that assigned merit, worth, and significance, the researcher utilized evaluation coding to determine what judgments the participants had about using social media to in their teaching practices. The codes were flexible in order to allow themes to arise from that data instead of forcing the data into a preconceived outline (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Ultimately, after interacting with the data in order to get a conceptual sense of it (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), the researcher narrowed down the themes to report by focusing on ones of greatest import to the research questions.

The researcher verified the essential themes identified in analysis by member checking and peer reviewing. The participants were asked to look over the study before submission, in order to confirm that their experiences were described and interpreted correctly. Input from peers was sought to provide an external check on the themes and meanings pulled from the data (Creswell, 2013). By triangulating data in this manner, as well as being aware of potential researcher bias, the study was strengthened and supported.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

Why Are Instructors Incorporating Social Media Into Their Teaching Practices?

Many instructors expressed the need for students to learn how to communicate by conforming to the conventions on social media, not only because it is part of their daily lives already, but because it is embedded into our entire culture: personally, academically, and professionally. One instructor stressed the rhetorical importance of social media:

They are legitimate forms of discourse where they're not just part of a student's life while they're a student. My students now can apply for jobs where they Tweet for an organization for a living, so why not have that type of writing be part of what we do in our classroom? -10

Giving students direct experience in the platforms was a key component in many of the classrooms. Aside from just allowing students to become more confident using social media as a tool, many participants wanted to help students acquire a positive, professional online persona. In-class discussions steered students toward crafting an identity within social media that not only gave potential employers examples of professional communication but also was an accurate representation of their offline personality. Cleaning up personal profiles, creating accounts on networking sites, and linking work from different media were objectives of assignments in many classrooms.

Staying in touch with alumni or other contacts through personal or professional online communities helped keep instructors informed about what is happening in the workforce. Additionally, participants said that social media offered new ways for them to bring speakers from a variety of locations, across the United States and from other countries, into the classroom. By using online platforms, participants were able to bring in more presenters throughout the semester using fewer resources. Giving students an opportunity to see the

kind of jobs that are available was valuable in itself. Instructors indicated that introducing students to professionals in this way culminated in more networking opportunities than having guest speakers visit the classroom.

In addition to exposing students to diverse vocations and connecting them with people in the industry, instructors wanted to try to create scenarios they might encounter in the workplace. From having students present messages in multiple formats depending on the platform or audience to exploring how different teams work within organizations, preparation for the professional environment was a factor for the participants. This instructor articulated trying to create that through online space:

One of my goals when I came in to teach here was I wanted to create an agency atmosphere to help prepare them for the real world. Within the classroom how can I make it as real-life as possible? It was hard because ... in the real world we would all meet together and work on stuff ... out in the corporate world, everything is integrated and it's all very synergistic. -6

Another driving force that many participants talked about was their desire to “meet students where they are” and believed students spend a lot of time on social media.

Instructors tried to connect the learning environment with what students know:

[Students] participate in social media. That's part of who they are these days. So, they will Tweet, they will send Instagrams, they will post on Facebook. That's an authentic task that they will engage in as part of their life, so if we can provide them with tasks and activities that will facilitate their participation in social media, then I think we're doing them a favor ... if they're going to do something anyhow, what can we do to enhance the educational value, or how can we put a little bit of education in there? -8

One participant went a step further and said that social media are not just a place where students spend time, they are their language:

I want to talk to them in their own language. If I was in Spain, I wouldn't teach in English. I'd have to teach in Spanish, that's their language. Well, this is their language, the language of social media. I think instructors have to be up-to-date on that. It doesn't matter if you're in communications. -6

Instructors noted that social media are an easy way to gain access to relevant content and current events. Several participants stated that they tailor lectures and discussions to reflect what is significant for the students, either in class or within the context of what is happening in society, at that particular moment. One instructor used Twitter to see what students were learning on particular days:

I've let students Tweet points that they've come across during films I've shown. Then it becomes a way for me to see the points that they're talking about or that they're getting from the films. Then at the end of the film being able to discuss or elaborate on it, or probe the student more about "Why did this point stick out?" or "Here's what you said, but maybe, do you really think that's what author was after? So let's probe a little deeper into it or see why you reacted to this thing the way you did." -9

Some participants used social media to gain feedback on the class in general in order to make changes from semester to semester:

I think it's a good way to keep track of what's going on with the students, to figure out what's working, what's not working, what their attitudes and opinions are on things. I'm the kind of person I try to modify my courses every single semester. It drives me nuts, but I really want to make sure that I'm giving them what they need. -4

Taking that a step further, one instructor used social media to gauge student interest in order to fine-tune the content presented during each semester:

I can't imagine teaching without it because how do you know what's effective? I don't want to wait until the end of the semester and get my course evaluation. I get some of that feedback throughout the whole semester. I get it back early so I can make adjustments if I need to. I'll talk about what they want to talk about. I can reframe most anything to fit into the objectives of the course, so I'm interested in what content is interesting to them. -6

Since the instructors interviewed all had a focus on communication in one form or another, they wanted to make sure that students were learning and practicing the conventions of different social media platforms. Participants voiced that the restrictions imposed by the functionality of a particular site sometimes aided them in guiding students to clearer, more

concise messages. In regards to using Twitter and limiting students to 140 characters for their posts, one instructor said:

[I want to] teach them to be succinct, which I think for a writing class is especially important. So often they're trained that the more words they can put down on the paper, the more impressed people are going to be. And I think finding the right words to use rather than the most amount of words can be a very effective tool. -7

Whether the goal was to write for a single platform or multiple venues, participants conveyed the importance of being able to get to the heart of a message. Additionally, instructors underscored audience analysis as an essential component of creating their communication packages. They felt that students were successful when they could get to the core of an idea, determine if it was valuable information to pass on to others, and finally, share what they wanted to say and what needed to be said.

Instructors were not only concerned with getting students to write for different platforms and different audiences, they wanted students to cultivate a critical awareness about consuming media. Many of the instructors engaged students in discussions about trustworthiness and credibility. This instructor emphasized the need to research where information comes from:

Something that is going to be a real challenge for us is creating educated news consumers and really having to say, 'No, you didn't get this article from Facebook because Facebook didn't pay to send the reporter to go gather this information.' Who actually was the person who went out, went to the meeting, read the documents, talked to the sources and wrote this article to go? What are that person's qualifications? What organization do they work for? Who's paying for them to be able to produce this? What's their agenda if they have one? That's something when you have just articles and links flying at you through social media that they all look the same, so it adds an extra layer that we have to cut through to be able to get students to think about where's this information actually coming from? -3

Opening up new avenues of participation for students was a recurring theme in the interviews. Some instructors thought that adding a discussion component online allowed

students who needed more time to articulate responses to feel more comfortable or that the online environment might be less intimidating than speaking up in class. Another instructor added this leveled view:

If we think about requiring participation in class. How often teachers promote that as speaking up, it's like a vocal performance—which I find ablest and alarming. If you're not someone who wants to talk a lot, especially in a writing class, why are we rewarding speaking up as the only way to participate? Why are instructors so scared of silence in their classroom? That doesn't mean people aren't learning. I'm often very quiet. (Laughter) I really think we can complicate those notions. But social media platforms can really help give students more options, if you have students watch a film and tweet during it or be writing on an online platform at the same time. It's not like those platforms are perfect either, but it gives you a new set of affordances for how conversations and dialog can take place. -10

Many participants thought of social media as an unobtrusive and accessible way to expand beyond the physical classroom. Instructors felt that posting links to relevant articles kept students who were interested engaged in the course concepts throughout the week. Rather than sending out emails or uploading content to the course site on Blackboard, using social media put the information in a place where students would see it and they could decide whether they wanted to click or just keep scrolling.

Other instructors recognized that students seemed to want a venue to share examples that related to topics in class. Whether it was an advertisement that exemplified the communication theory they were studying or a video that reflected a concept from the reading, having an option for students to share them with each other and the instructor made sense. Social media platforms offered a convenient way for students to contribute.

How Are Instructors Incorporating Social Media Into Their Teaching Practices?

The most common platforms used by instructors in this study were Facebook and Twitter. Typically, instructors created a private Facebook page and invited students at the

beginning of each semester. The instructor who wanted to create the agency-like atmosphere set up one Facebook page for all three classes. In that instance, each class posted issues relating to their specific discipline but could see and, if they wanted to, join in the conversation on any of the topics. Instructors using Twitter asked students to follow their account and Tweet using a hashtag designated for their class. Some participants focused specifically on creating discussion on these two platforms. Others posted information about job or internship opportunities, university events, and links to material that supplemented the current topic in class. In many cases, it was a combination of those two techniques.

Skype and Google Hangout were used for videoconferencing to bring in guest speakers. Some instructors required or encouraged students to develop profiles on LinkedIn. The photo and video sharing options named were YouTube, Vine, and Instagram. YouTube was frequently used as a source for instructors to pull in examples to analyze. Several instructors had students create videos in class. A few of them gave students the option to post them to YouTube. However, one instructor made that a requirement:

We are practicing a bit with YouTube. Their group project for this class is one where they're assigned to create a video and try to then distribute it to a larger group. Part of the assignment is to come up with a plan for how you're going to get the views or the comments and some measure of their success is how successful they are at that. -12

Another participant mentioned podcasts as a social media platform to present students with pertinent course content:

It started with using podcasting for listening strategies. That's what students can do. They sit on the bus, they have their little iPod with them, they can listen to podcasts, and we had podcasts that tied in with the curriculum of the class. It simplified some of the strategies that they were engaged in, or that we tried to teach them, and then they could practice them outside of class. -8

Several instructors mentioned having students develop personal blogs, but WordPress was the only site specifically mentioned for that function. However, Tumblr, also considered

a blogging site, was used as a place for students to find inspiration for projects in class. One instructor reported creating class wikis through PBworks:

We actually have a separate class wiki that we use in the same way that a lot of social networks would work. I had them each set up their own profile, so they have their own picture and information about themselves and they put videos on there. That same sort of sense like a Facebook profile would have. Then they're able to comment on each other's pages. That's also, where then, our online discussions happen. -12

Half of the participants required students to use social media as part of their class or classes. Each instructor approached assessment a little differently. For some, making sure that students engaged in discussion through social media was essential. Therefore, part of the participation grade was tied to whether or not students completed the minimum requirements. For others, social media assignments were more comprehensive. Students needed to achieve certain objectives and adhere to the conventions of the particular platform. In those cases, the finished projects were assessed on quality of all the material presented. One instructor shared this example in which conventions of each media were evaluated on basic standards discussed in class and the creative introductory Tweet:

For an assignment, they have to go out and create a little six-second Vine video and they have to take two photos. The cutline for those photos has to be a Tweet, so the cutline cannot be more than 140 characters, it has to be enticing, so that I want to click on the link and see the photo or watch the video. -5

The other instructors provided social media opportunities for their students that were completely optional. Some of these instructors wanted to give their students an alternative way of participating. Others utilized social media as a space where students could access additional content and community support:

I've included social media as a way to extend the classroom, to give students who will spend time on social media anyhow, to present them with options that would help them think about, solidify, or learn new points that are relevant or related to what was covered in class. -8

Aside from having students log into platforms, instructors had assignments or in-class exercises that analyzed various aspects of social media. One example looked at content:

We also use Twitter outside of the Twitter posts as a way to analyze material. So we'll look at companies' Twitter pages to see how they use different rhetorical appeals such as ethos, pathos and logos. And what I like about that activity is that is constantly changing ... Social media is so fluid, I come in with very few expectations for those assignments and get to experience and discover with the students as well which is kind of fun for me. -7

Another example analyzed sites:

We talk about how we look at LinkedIn or some sites like that and say what is the audience for this site? What does this site seem to be assuming about what its users want to do? -3

One instructor used the absence of social media to get students to reflect on the expectations of communication in today's society:

I have one assignment that I ask [students] to go offline for 24 hours. They can use the Internet, but they can't communicate with anybody via the Internet. They have to decide for themselves what counts as communication in an online space. If they're looking up pages ... like going to Wikipedia, does that count as communication or not? They decide that for themselves. They can't text; they can't Snapchat. Definitely no Facebook or Twitter, but they can make calls. It's not that they're completely cut off, they just have to go back to making calls as opposed to some of the faster ways of communicating. They do that for 24 hours and then they reflect on how that experience of taking it away allowed them insight into how it's impacting their lives. They get an awareness of both their own reliance on it as well as the way that society or the people around us encourage us to be connected to it as well. -12

Instructors also felt that using social media had benefits beyond the direct classroom applications. Many participants sought out new teaching ideas or explored the discourse of their field via social media. One instructor reported working with other professors on an online platform that allows instructors to create and share content that helps "make teaching better and learning faster and more effective" through a database.

Overall, the most common uses of social media for instruction included using Facebook and Twitter for discussion and reading responses. Beyond contributing to

discussion, students often participated by sharing examples that related to course concepts. Another common use was instructors posting content relevant to the subject matter or professional opportunities.

What Are Instructors' Experiences and Perceptions?

Several instructors recounted instances where social media strengthened their ability to build class community. One instructor shared a story about taking an entire class selfie in a large lecture course. Adding that quite often students can feel lost in a group that big, this instructor said the experience led to deeper connections that might not have occurred otherwise:

Is it strictly academic? No. Does it affect the environment and help the faculty and students to build relationships and to engage upon another? Yes. -5

Another instructor described a situation in which students opened up differently in an online situation:

They're always super supportive, and they're also pretty excited about reading through them because at this point they typically are seniors. They've been in classes with each other before, so they usually have a general sense about who everybody is, but getting to read their profile and see what kind of information they post. A lot of times the comments are like, "Hey I didn't know that you like soccer," or, "I didn't know you were from this town." So they're finding those connections or that information they didn't have. -12

When asked about the positive experiences using social media in their classes, participants articulated stories of achieving some level of value for the students, often with intuitive assessment:

Posting links on the Blackboard site might get a few dedicated students who are really committed to checking that every day but by Tweeting at them, I think, I haven't measured, but it's just the gut feeling that a higher percentage will tap on it and read it. Part of the reason my gut feeling is that way is the number of students who will favorite it or retweet or mention it when they come in class, it seems pretty high. -5

I don't know if I ever truly achieve my goals or objectives. I think I'm moving closer to them, so anything that I do, and feedback that I receive from the students indicate that they like these activities. This is anecdotal, but I see an increase in motivation, and that's why I try to refine it, try to reuse it, try to make it better. When students bring up the materials that are on Facebook and say, "Hey, I looked at this. I liked it." Then they end up not making the same mistakes anymore, I'm able to attribute some of the learning to activities that we put online. -8

I think I get better discussion from the students, and we probably go a bit deeper. I've never done a study where you use social media in the classroom in one and not in the other, and to kind of gauge that reaction, so I can't say definitively, but I think it makes the classroom just a more relaxed space. -11

One instructor illustrated how an out-of-class activity using social media created a dynamic and focused experience in class:

We would always talk about [the Super Bowl] in class the next day in semesters past. Well, this year, I did a hashtag and I said, "Comment on it as it's happening. Live-tweet about what your thoughts are. Did you like it, not like it? Why?" I had over 400 Tweets. Now, that creates some other problems because then I have to go through and read them all, but I thought that was pretty successful considering my three classes this semester, there's probably not more than 70, 75 kids. Not everyone Tweeted. People were mostly Tweeting multiple times, but I found that as very successful. I think that just proves that kids are more engaged when they're using something that they already use anyway. If I can leverage that some way, it's going to make my teaching more effective. Twitter's great because again, that's how most of them communicate. It really helps me understand what they like and don't like. Then we can talk about that in class versus me trying to figure out what is relevant. For example, I could tell by the Tweets which ads they really liked and which ones they really didn't like. I could pull those out of the 50+ ads that were running during the Super Bowl. I could pick out those few that everyone seemed to be really concentrating on and then have more conversations about that. It makes the classroom more dynamic and engaging. -6

Several instructors described ways in which social media helped them achieve certain educational goals. Some instructors had current students who were able to observe something in their everyday life, analyze it, and relate it back to the class by posting thoughtfully to the class hashtag. Another instructor was able to use social media to see that former students were continuing to use their skills:

One is the students who've written blogs, I do have students who keep writing on them for years after my class. They've never written on a WordPress platform before and maybe they've done some other writing in their lives, like fan fiction or something, we have a lot of creative students who do stuff like that in their free time. Since I use an RSS reader to be able to keep up with their writing as they're going, I can see years later they're still writing on them. That's really cool! As a writing teacher, it's like "They're still writing!" That's exactly what we want them to do is keep writing when they're not in the writing class anymore. -10

Many instructors observed that social media platforms were more inviting than

LMSs:

It might get them exposure to the ideas more there than Blackboard, where they're going to go in and read a few things to be able to do their post and then get out of it, and not think about it until the next day. Whereas on Facebook they have something that is constantly evolving, then they may be tuning into the whole discussion more than they would in Blackboard. -2

Offered more immediate contact:

If there were a message that you needed to get distributed, you can probably get a message to them faster [with social media] than you can by posting it up on Blackboard and having the announcement sent out over email. Students go days at a time without logging into Blackboard and the same thing for email. I'm increasingly not surprised; although, it's still bewildering to me how many students have said they never check email. They'll go weeks without looking at their email which makes communicating with them difficult. -3

Were more mobile-friendly:

The students have their phones with them all the time and they're on them all the time. If you really want to get stuff out and get stuff out to them right now, if you have something that's breaking that you really want them to take a look at, it's a really great way to get ahold of them immediately, without having to wait for them to check their email, check their Blackboard. -4

Some instructors saw other benefits to handheld devices and mentioned that

the interface of LMSs are not optimized for mobile technology:

The other thing about social media is we don't have to have computers in front of every student to be able to talk about social media or use social media in the classroom, because I have not come across a student in the last couple of years that doesn't have a phone on them that doesn't have some of these applications on them. -11

Instructors saw social media as something that was ready and available when the students were:

Students are posting stuff at like midnight or whatever. It's a 24-hour cycle, so students aren't on my timetable. I'm well in bed by 10:00, so having them post stuff when they want to, it's convenient for them. -6

I think it gives them an outlet to more immediately communicate things that they've observed related to the class. Because if we only meet Tuesday/Thursday, they see something on the Thursday afternoon and we don't see each other again until Tuesday, they may forget it or it might not have the same impact. -8

Instructors saw that social media allowed students to connect their experience to other audiences outside the classroom and were able to see that impact:

I will often find that the remarks that they are making they're very insightful anyway and they use vocabulary that does connect to a wider audience and it'll end up being liked by other groups and organizations. You can tell that the way that they had worded it, it was useful to more than just us. -7

Using social media was also a more inviting way for students to contribute in the digital environment and take ownership of their material:

Also using non-LMS platforms is another deliberate teaching decision. Blackboard is called Blackboard. That's a teacher space, student don't just walk up to the blackboard and start writing things in class, right? That's recognizable space that only the teacher gets to occupy. I'm against having students, for example, write blogs on Blackboard because then all that information is trapped in that system of students through the university. They don't have any way to take it with them. -10

Social media also offered more room for creativity. Different platforms allowed students flexibility:

The thing I liked about course wiki is that everybody is a writer of that site. They have a lot of leeway in terms of what pages get put up, what information is there. I assigned them to their groups last week and so now they have a group page. I haven't given them any assignment for the group page, it's just a place where I host the links to their online discussions or any other relevant information that they need. A couple of the groups have actually gone in because they had their individual profile assignment and created a profile for their groups. They added some pictures and things, explained their group

names, kind of something that sets that theme for the group. That's great to see because that is something that they might not have the ability to do with Blackboard--where it's very much the instructor creates this stuff and then students can add to it, but they don't have the same sort of creative liberty. -12

Even with all these positive experiences, instructors voiced some concerns with social media. Many instructors felt that social media were a huge distraction in and out of the classroom. They noted that students struggle with multi-tasking when working on classwork and worried that adding a social media component would add to that. Some participants were still negotiating what use in the classroom looked like and how they could keep students on task.

Another big drawback to incorporating social media into the classroom was the level of expertise that students have:

I think we tend to overestimate when it comes to new technologies how much our students know coming in. We just assume all our students know how to use all the various functions of their phone and security settings and different types of connections and this and that. They know how to use geolocation type systems. They know how to get into databases and use all the social media stuff and edit videos and things like that. Really, for a lot of students, as enamored as they are with the technology, they really don't know a whole lot about how to actually use it. -3

Participants brought up their own comfort level and experience with different types of technology. Instructors stated that they wanted to stay updated on the current technology, platforms, and trends, even if they had no plans to use them in their teaching. They felt it was important to be informed and be able to discuss them with students. Some voiced curiosity about how other instructors use social media in their classes. Often the participants expressed frustration in the lack of conversation about current teaching methods or difficulty in trying to participate in that dialogue:

If you talk to other people they may be way less hesitant to use it more open or open to interaction things like that. There isn't a whole lot of ways for faculty to see what other people are doing or hear about it. Faculty for the

most part are wrapped up in their research areas, which cannot be teaching, or they're wrapped up in their teaching that tends to be a lot about getting through the day, one day at a time. There are a lot of good ways of understanding and seeing what other people are doing. Unfortunately, as a lot more of the stuff moves online, there's even fewer ways to see it. I can at least walk around to see some of our colleagues and what they're doing in their classroom. Once the stuff goes in digital, you can't see any of it. -1

This, of course, creates opportunities for instructors to teach students how to use the various tools by adhering to the conventions of each platform and understanding the account settings. Instructors were also cognizant of the dynamic nature of social media. The constantly evolving new platforms and trends make it difficult to stay relevant. Yik Yak and Snapchat were mentioned as two newer forms of social media that instructors could not see many, if any, value for education, but acknowledged that students might be on those platforms more than “grandma’s Facebook” or Twitter. This instructor spoke about the frustration of trying to stay up-to-date:

I think that there are social media that are very timely for our students that are maybe not using them in the classroom, so the social media that I think we've kind of figured out the best pedagogical use of those, students feel are a little bit old and out of date. -11

Incorporating social media takes time. Setting up sites for classes each semester; monitoring the pages and conversation for appropriate behavior; providing feedback to let students know that they are engaged are all concerns that instructors voiced. Participants expressed that they wanted to do more but time did not allow. One instructor explained:

I think that it makes it harder for me, quite honestly, because every semester I have to come up with new content. It has to change every semester. It's very easy for me to pull this stuff out. Then, I have to read it and disseminate it and analyze it, and I have to do that every semester, so it's hard, but I think that they enjoy that because it's part of their psyche I think, as millennials. They're the "right here, right now, what's going on," versus if I showed something that was even two years ago, they'd probably be like, "Oh my God, that's so old. That's totally outdated." ... and don't bite off more social media than you can chew, because if you try to do five or six different things, you're probably not going to do any one of them very well. It takes a lot of time. -6

Time was not the only factor causing instructors apprehension when using and monitoring social media use. Some platforms are more difficult to monitor:

As an instructor, I have to be, I think, a little bit extra aware to watch for those kind of cues that someone is maybe being picked on, or that someone's hashtag is being referenced a lot or user ID, to just make sure that things don't step over a line. It's one of the reasons, I think, why I haven't gone to like Snapchat or Vine because I know how I can kind of put a net around Twitter, but I don't really know how you track something like Snapchat when things disappear. I know you can take screenshots of it and stuff, but there's no way for me as an instructor to intervene if someone has Snapchatted someone that has hurt their feelings. There's no way for me to get that and see that that has happened, so that just opens up maybe a little bit too much possibility in the classroom. -11

Social media are a public platform and instructors worried about student privacy. They also had ethical concerns about forcing it, noting that there are students who choose not have social media accounts for very specific reasons, whereas, Blackboard complied with the rules set by the university and all students are issued an account.

Many participants expressed that some forms of social media have more self-expression capabilities than others. For instance, one instructor used Facebook as an example of a platform with many opportunities for students to share their private lives online, whereas LinkedIn had more of a directory feel. Often, instructors indicated that sometimes it was challenging to negotiate what they should share or that they had no interest in learning what students were doing on the weekends, so they were more comfortable utilizing social media that limited the sharing of those details. Some stated the difficulty in negotiating a balance between personal, professional, and academic use, not only for themselves but also for their students. One instructor spoke about the imbalanced power dynamic social media can create:

As we think about privacy issues and students, putting students' work online, one issue I have when instructors require Twitter, or require Facebook in class is that it's opening up a student's personal life to a classroom community that they haven't necessarily chosen to be in. Normally that requires linking your account to the professor's account, and doing all these other actions that a

student might not necessarily do with someone who has power over them. There's something perhaps ethically suspicious about asking our students to open up their social lives in that way to us and we're their teachers. -10

An instructor observed the online disinhibition effect. Sometimes students are not exactly sure who the audience is or because they are sitting behind the protection of a computer screen can end up sharing too much:

"I did have one student one semester who had written her profile and somehow didn't realize that it would be available for everybody to see. She had disclosed information that she didn't necessarily want the whole class to know and then she thought about it after the fact and then went back and edited it. She e-mailed me to let me know about it, and to check and make sure that that was removed and that that information was not available to everybody. -12

Another concern was appropriate use. Instructors wanted to make sure that students were sharing information the right way:

Early on I explained in the semester that just because something does relate to the class doesn't necessarily mean that it should be retweeted word for word. Or if a link is sent and if it is something that might be offensive, how do you reframe it for your intended audience? -9

Many instructors shared sentiments that social media are not right for all classes. Depending on the subject matter and other requirements in the course, instructors could see the value in some classes but not in others. For instance, an advertising course would have lots of opportunities to share content and examples through social media, but having mobile devices out during a public speaking course might be problematic. If a course called for longer, analysis-based essays and papers, adding another component to the class via social media seemed like too much for the students, so instructors chose not to integrate it. Participants also struggled with the inherent design of certain social media applications and felt that the functionality was not suited for education. Often they expressed that LMSs were

valuable in that they were able to securely post grades and that they could establish permanence and priority of information:

You have the ability, as the instructor, to group things the way they need to be adapted for that course. If there are going to be a lot of supplemental readings you can group them in one place. If you have several different types of assignments, you can group them a certain way. If you have information that's just extra information for students or for particular groups of students, you have that flexibility with a course management system to make it be what you need. Whereas on social media the grouping of information for the most part is dictated by whatever platform you're using." -3

As instructors described how they use social media, they often conveyed that there was more that they could or should do than they were actually doing. Some said they would read articles about cutting-edge uses and wonder if anyone was really doing those things. Many stated that they were taking a conservative approach and that trying something new in the classroom was a bit of a risk. Before introducing a social media platform into the classroom, they needed to be familiar enough to troubleshoot if something did not work out the way they intended. Instructors felt they should be acquainted with the social media and the settings in order to find ways to work around the issues. Above all, they wanted to make sure they were using it as a tool that added value and not just because it was there.

In summary, there were many perceived benefits. Most instructors felt social media built class community on a different level. They added innovative ways to connect, both with people and with content. Social media allowed instructors to achieve learning objectives in a more immediate, inviting, and mobile-friendly environment than LMSs. Most of the concerns were focused on being familiar with the changing technology and being comfortable using it as an effective tool. In comparison to LMSs, social media were not always optimized for educational use. Additionally, there were some who voiced that communicating and monitoring for appropriate use was a challenge. Some instructors said that it was easier to

utilize social media with upperclassmen because they took it more seriously and had a maturity level that younger students might not have. Overall, the most expressed sentiment was that using social media for teaching was hard and it took a lot of time, but it was worth it.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

The research questions posed in this study explored why and how instructors use social media in undergraduate education, and investigated their experiences and perceptions. This was achieved through in-depth interviews with undergraduate instructors in communication fields in the Arts and Humanities. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher observed that the motivations instructors used social media directly influenced how they chose to integrate it into their courses. Often the participants' experiences and perceptions were based on the outcomes of what they did and either led them to keep using social media in the same way, to alter its use to better achieve the objectives, or to decide that it did not add value and ultimately dismiss it.

The reasons instructors choose to utilize social media were diverse. From teaching students valuable skills to extending learning beyond the classroom, participants shared their motivations and goals for deciding on social media tools. Learning objectives were a big influence on their decision to integrate social media into their curricula. Instructors expressed a desire to have students writing for different platforms, developing critical thinking skills, creating and analyzing online identities, as well as receiving and sharing relevant content.

The data gathered on why instructors are using social media illustrates some advantages that may be useful for instructors who are not currently using social media and are looking for reasons. Not surprisingly, instructors were aware of the importance that social media play in many aspects of life, especially those mentioned in the literature reviewed and wanted to build a critical awareness of the consequences of participation and consumption. Students might need to understand and use social media for practical or vocational purposes.

Instructors can use social media to teach students the conventions of the platform and etiquette of use. For instructors looking for ways to engage their students and “meet them where they are,” social media platforms can be a good way. The findings confirm Greenhow’s (2011) argument that social media are beneficial in student-centered courses. It seemed as though elements of both Chickering and Gamson’s principles and Bloom’s Taxonomy were present in the decision to use social media. From increasing contact with students to providing diverse levels of cognitive engagement, many instructors used social media as a tool to create an environment of learning that appealed to various types of learners. Social media can also be an approach that instructors can utilize if they want to gather feedback from students about what is working or not working in the class. Supporting Bjerede et al. (2010) findings that social media improve access and availability, social media can offer alternative ways for students to participate in class, engage in discussion, and actively contribute to class that is appealing for collaborative learning situations. The different platforms of social media can offer instructors a means to teach students to be succinct and articulate the heart of a message for different audiences as suggested by Nicolini et al. (2012). Finally, being familiar with social media is essential in order for teachers to have successful integration. Instructors need to set up clear learning objectives. Students need to have guidelines for frequency and substance of posts and the expectations for assessment need to be emphasized (Sample, 2010). Additionally, monitoring student contributions for appropriateness and comprehension is crucial (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Poore, 2013).

This research has indicated that there is a discrepancy in instructors’ definition of “use” when it comes to incorporating social media into their teaching practices. A majority of

the instructors reported that they have their students logging on to the platforms, yet a few just use social media to pull in examples to analyze during class. Even those who were having their students utilize the sites sometimes were unsure if what they were doing qualified as “use.” Moreover, the research found instructors incorporated social media into their classes in ways that were as varied as the subject matter and the classes they taught. Depending on the learning objectives targeted by the specific social media use, participant answers ranged in many aspects including the platforms they chose and whether it was mandatory or voluntary for students.

The collected data presents some ideas for instructors who need a place to start when adding social media to their class or for instructors looking to diversify their current use. Instructors new to social media should start with the most popular sites, like Facebook and Twitter. Some social media platforms have terms of service that necessitate a real identity to create an account, like Facebook or Google+. If instructors are going to require those types of applications, they should clearly state that in the syllabus so students know about it. For instructors who are uncomfortable making students to sign up for a social media account tied to their identity, there are platforms that allow students to create anonymous accounts that can be deleted after the course such as Twitter and certain blogs. Even though many students have smartphones or other mobile devices, instructors should be aware that not all do. Assignments that use an application that is only available through a mobile platform, such as Vine or Instagram, should be approached with flexibility. Arranging alternatives like taking a picture with another device and allowing students to submit another way or having students work in groups are a couple of options. In cases where student use was mandatory, there was a higher rate of participation. However, there are options to include social media without

requiring them to log on. In those instances, students may not get the skills training and practice operating on the platforms but they can still be educated about them and offer critical thinking opportunities. Targeting learning objectives and having specific goals will guide the parameters of use and help to make sure that the social media tasks have added value. Finally, in addition to seeking out previous studies that highlight the benefits or drawbacks of social media use in educational environments, instructors can reach out to other educators to gain new ideas for teaching or relevant material for classes by participating in social media themselves.

The participants relayed many benefits when sharing their experiences. They talked about added value and what social media allowed them to do that they might not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. However, their responses were tempered with caution. They had personal experience with the challenges of using the technology and offered insight about those drawbacks. In addition, many voiced their concern that they were not using social media to their full potential. They felt that others used it more effectively, more often, or more creatively. There seems to be a third-person effect at work in this case, and one implication of this study's findings is that instructors should talk more among themselves and share teaching ideas rather than navigate this new world of possibilities in isolation.

Based on these experiences, for instructors of large and small classes looking to foster more of a community atmosphere, social media provide a channel for both academic purposes and rapport-building communication. Empirical data provides one way for instructors to tell if something is working, but so can intuition. If something seems to be adding to the educational value of the classroom, then instructors should trust that feeling. Future research could provide empirical evidence of how intuition can be used for instructors

to gauge their efforts in the classroom. Teaching is a balance of many factors. Instructors who engage with students on social media can start discussions at a higher level because the conversations were already initiated outside of class. Social media allowed opportunities to immediately share or comment on things they connect to class whenever it is convenient and since social media is more mobile-friendly than LMSs, they might be more likely to engage. Assignments normally only seen by an instructor, and maybe classmates, now have an expanded audience. LMSs can provide an online space to discuss and connect outside of class but social media allows students to take ownership of their ideas and gives them more opportunities for creativity.

Even though social media might be a quicker way to reach students compared to email or Blackboard, platforms that instructors have chosen because they are popular with the general population might not necessarily be popular with the student population. Students, in turn, may not check those platforms as often. Instructors have to balance between picking a social media platform that is popular enough that students already know how to use it or should know how to use it when they graduate, but also consider what might be the next big platform. Participants were cognizant of different operating levels in terms of access to and prior use of social media platforms but had not really experienced too many examples of student inexperience or resistance. However, instructors should not assume that just because students use the technology they know all about its functions and professional conduct.

Instructors reported it can be very time consuming if they decide to incorporate social media in their teaching. However, some relief might come if they realize that they are not responsible for creating all the content. Instructors might naturally feel inclined that they

need to be the ones leading the way cultivating and curating content, but they should consider putting at least some of that responsibility into the hands of the students to see what they come up with. As one instructor said, let Blackboard be the teacher space. Instructors also need to clearly articulate who the audience is and their expectations of conduct on the sites.

It is important to note that instructors who are unfamiliar with social media or feel like everyone else knows how to use it should know that they are not alone. They should connect with other instructors, in their department, institution, and elsewhere outside of class, and not be intimidated because they think everyone else is better than them. Social media are an emerging and evolving technology, and there is a lot of new ground. So, instructors should not assume that everyone knows what they are doing and that opening up a conversation about teaching techniques will benefit everyone. Though most participants felt that it was challenging to keep up with the changing and evolving technology, they also thought it was important to try. Finally, there is no definitively right way to use social media.

However, this research revealed some ways that instructors are using social media in their classrooms in ways they thought added value for the students. There was a clear continuum of involvement on the part of the instructor and the subsequent lists are ordered from having the least commitment in terms of time and energy to the most. Many of the high-involvement practices combine both the idea of using social media as a tool to enhance the learning environment and teaching about social media.

Social media can be used as a tool to engage students with content for courses. The following are examples of how instructors can teach students through social media:

- Instructors can pull examples and content for class.
- Instructors can have students listen to selected podcasts or watch videos on subjects related to units.

- Students can find inspiration for projects or stories by looking through blogs and sites like Tumblr.
- Instructors can use LinkedIn to connect with potential guest speakers.
- Instructors can create a class Facebook group or a designated Twitter feed.
- Students can share relevant content with the class through Facebook or Twitter.
- Instructors can post links to articles and examples of class related material.
- Instructors can use Skype or Google Hangout for video conferencing.
- During videos or significant events, instructors and students can live-Tweet their reactions and thoughts.
- Instructors can create podcasts or videos about class content and share through social media sites.
- Students can create podcast or video projects that teach their classmates or other audiences about certain aspects of class content.

Social media can also be a way for instructors to teach students about social media literacy and give opportunities to build an online presence:

- Instructors can create their own accounts on social media platforms and familiarize themselves with the technology, conventions, and settings.
- Instructors can follow publications and colleagues.
- By participating in an online communication fast, instructors and students can have a dialogue on the ways technology impacts everyday life.
- Instructors can post links to articles on social media conventions and etiquette.
- Class discussions can be centered on analyzing incidents and interactions from current events.
- Students can be encouraged to clean up Facebook profiles.
- Instructors can have students create LinkedIn profiles.
- Instructors can set up a class wiki and have students create their own profiles.
- Students can develop their own blogs.
- Instructors can have students create media that adheres to the standards of particular platforms. For instance, Vine, Instagram, YouTube, and Vimeo are all video sharing sites that have specific requirements and conventions.

Some limitations in this study are inherent with those of qualitative research. The researcher interviewed a limited amount of instructors within one university. Therefore, this study cannot be generalizable. The focus was on instructor perspectives of the phenomenon. The researcher only talked to a small range of disciplines. Within those disciplines, it proved difficult to find subjects because of the discrepancies in the definitions of both “social media”

and “use.” Finally, due to the dynamic quality of social media, specifics about platforms and their functions will most likely be accurate for a limited time frame.

Since this study focused on instructors in the communications fields, they may seek out social media more since it is what they do. As such, it would be interesting to see what is being done in fields like science, mathematics, or design. Future studies could expand the range of disciplines and also adapt the interview guide to include specific definitions of social media and use, as teased out in the present study. Given participants’ uncertainty about the prevalence and sophistication of social-media use among other instructors, a quantitative survey could ascertain the extent to which social media are becoming the norm in the classroom. Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2013) found that blogs and wikis are the most common way that faculty are asking students to engage with content by creating, adding comments, or consuming, followed by podcasts, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Queirolo (2009) indicated that instructors are slow to adopt social media. The researcher used snowball sampling for this study, and some participants could not indicate with certainty who the next interviewee could be. Another suggestion for further research on this subject would be to take a qualitative approach on the student perspective. That type of research would allow students to elaborate on what engages them and give instructors new ideas to incorporate social media.

Nevertheless, this study was an important step in opening up the conversation about teaching practices using social media. The lack of idea exchange between instructors is pedagogical issue regardless of use of social media. However, social media can open up more avenues for these dialogues to take place. A lot of other studies about social media use in undergraduate education have used a quantitative approach. These have focused on student

perceptions and results. This study was unique in that it approached the subject matter from a qualitative perspective and focused on the experiences of instructors. This type of exploratory research is needed to discover the discrepancies in definitions and considerations for using social media as a tool that adds value to the classroom experience.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: Using Social Media in the Arts & Humanities Classroom

Investigator: Aimee Langager (advised by Dr. Raluca Cozma, Major Professor)

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of instructors who have adapted social media to use as part of their course(s). The specific research questions being addressed in the study include: (1) How are instructors using social media? (a) What are the benefits? (b) What are the drawbacks? (2) What are the instructors' perceptions and experiences of using social media? (3) What are the instructors' perceived effects on students and learning? (4) What is the future role of social media in education?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are an instructor in the Arts & Humanities who uses social media as part of their teaching practices.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate, your involvement will consist of an individual interview lasting approximately an hour and a half. This interview will be audio recorded. Interview questions will cover your experiences and perceptions of using social media as an instructor.

Risks or Discomforts

While participating in this study, the potential risks or discomforts involve only those inherent in self-reflection. As such, risks to you are minimal.

Benefits

If you decide to participate in this study, there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by contributing to the greater understanding of how instructors can use social media in an undergraduate education environment.

Costs and Compensation

You will not have any costs from participating in this study or be compensated for participating in this study.

Participant Rights

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. Your choice of whether or not to participate will have no impact on you as an employee in any way.

If you have any questions *about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury*, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

Confidentiality

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy study records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: Interviews will be tape recorded to foster accuracy in data collection and analysis. You will not be identified by name, either in the coding or the reporting of the data in this study. The principal investigator will store the notes in a locked cabinet for three years. Any computer files containing data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, will be password protected. Should you withdraw from the study, at any point, your files will be deleted and will not be used in the study. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to review the written report prior to its dissemination. In the event of any report or publication from this study, your identity will not be disclosed. Results will be reported in a summarized manner in such a way that you cannot be identified.

Questions

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information *about the study*, contact the principal investigator, Aimee Langager (langager@iastate.edu), or the supervising faculty, Dr. Raluca Cozma (rcozma@iastate.edu).

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Tell me about your teaching experience.

Tell me about how you incorporate social media into your classes.

Walk me through your course objectives/assignments utilizing social media.

How do you think social media will impact students?

How do you think social media enhances the learning environment?

How do you think social media enhance your value as an instructor?

How do you think social media influences class interaction? (overall? face-to-face? etc.)

What factors influenced your decision to start using social media?

Do you think social media needs to be used in undergraduate education?

Do you think you've achieved your goals and learning objectives with social media?

Have you encountered any challenges with integrating social media?

What has been the best experience you've had using social media with your instruction?

If you had unlimited resources (time, money, support, etc.), what would you like to do with social media in your classes?

Prompts include:

Would you give me an example?

Can you elaborate on that idea?

Would you explain that further?

Can you explain that in a different way?

Is there anything else?

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